MARVEL MAX
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MARVEL PSR+

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BLACK WIDOW

LAND
Ryan
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BLACK WIDOW

Part 4: No Place Like Home

The Black Widow. Russian intelligence agent, KGB-recruited. A Soviet weapon of the Cold War. Legend of the covert Moscow espionage academy known as the Red Room. Later, a defector to the U.S. and a freelance agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.

Now, a retired spy who's just been pulled back into the game, thanks to a Russian assassin sent by an unknown man, wealthy and powerful, who wants her dead.

To discover why, Natasha enlists the help of Phil Dexter, an old ally from her S.H.I.E.L.D. days. Together, they discover that Natasha was one of several kill targets, all of whom were women…and at least one of whom was ex-KGB. The murder victim was also pregnant and taking two types of medications: military-issue painkillers, and an unknown substance called Medusagen.

The man who wants Natasha dead sends out two new agents to finish the job. Max and Kestrel are freelance operatives working for the North Institute, a powerful American agency with vast government resources. They are rapidly closing in.

Natasha's latest interrogations reveal an unpleasant new development: her old Soviet intelligence academy, the Red Room, is back in business. Now trading as 2R, they have unknown ties to Gynacon, a U.S. cosmetics corporation branching out into hormone replacement and anti-aging treatments. The nature of their relationship is unknown, but one thing becomes chillingly clear: To discover the truth, Natasha must return to Russia for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union…

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YOU CAN NEVER GO HOME.

MOSCOW

MEMORY COLLIDES WITH *CURRENT REALITY.* IT'S A CAR WRECK YOU CAN ONLY GET HURT IN.

BOLSHOI WELCOMES

I SHOULDN'T REALLY BE *DOING* THIS.

I'M SUPPOSED TO BE RUNNING DOWN THE LEADS I TORTURED OUT OF MARTIN FERRIS, NOT WALLOWING IN SAD-CASE NOSTALGIA.

YES, I'M HERE WITH *INTERMEDIA PRODUCTIONS.* I WAS WONDERING IF I COULD TALK TO *ALEX STERELNY.* HE'S AN *OLD FRIEND,* YOU SEE.

STERELNY?

YES, HE'S ONE OF YOUR *TRAINERS.* BUT MAYBE HE'S RETIRED OR--

I'M SORRY, I'VE WORKED FOR THE BOLSHOI FOR *THIRTY YEARS.* I DON'T RECOLLECT *ANYONE* OF THAT NAME. ARE YOU SURE...?

I'M GETTING THAT REACTION A LOT SINCE I GOT HERE.

BACK IN THE *OLD DAYS*, PEOPLE DISAPPEARED WITHOUT A TRACE *ALL THE TIME*. SOMETIMES I EVEN HELPED MAKE IT HAPPEN.

KGB--IT WAS PART OF WHAT WE DID BACK THEN.

BUT THIS *ISN'T* THE OLD DAYS.

AND HALF THESE OLD FRIENDS I CAN'T FIND--THEY WERE *STATE-FAVORED APPARATCHIKS*. THERE SHOULD BE *SOME* TRACE.

IT FEELS LIKE SEARCHING A *CITY OF GHOSTS*.

NO, *WORSE* THAN THAT. IT FEELS LIKE *I'M* THE GHOST.

HAUNTING A PAST THAT'S *DEAD AND GONE*.

MY HEAD HURTS.

BUT DAMN IT, I *REMEMBER* ALEX STERELNY. HE MADE ME INTO A *DANCER.*

...FORTY-ONE, FORTY-TWO, FORTY-THREE, *COME ON,* NATASHA...

COME ON, NATASHA, ENOUGH DAYDREAMING, BACK TO WORK NOW.

YEAH, YEAH, BACK TO WORK. FORGET YOUR OLD FRIENDS, START LOOKING FOR YOUR NEW ENEMIES.

BUT NOTHING'S THE WAY I REMEMBER IT. *NOTHING.*

IN THE OLD DAYS, WE WERE MADE TO *FEAR THE WEST.*

WE WERE TOLD THEY'D COME WITH *TANKS* AND *MISSILES...*

...AND DESTROY WHAT WE'D BUILT.

INSTEAD, THEY CAME WITH MONEY.
AND WE HELPED THEM TEAR IT ALL DOWN OURSELVES.

NOW THE GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR IS WIDER THAN IT'S EVER BEEN.

AND THE NAME NATASHA HAS A NEW MEANING.

SOMETIMES I WONDER IF I SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE, TRYING TO STOP IT ALL COMING TO THIS.

TOO LATE NOW.

HOW YOU DOING, NAT?

GETTING NOWHERE FAST. I CHECKED THE FIRST COUPLE OF ADDRESSES I GOT OUT OF FERRIS. THERE'S NOTHING THERE.

IT'S LIKE SOMEONE ELSE GOT HERE AHEAD OF ME.

MAYBE SOMEONE DID. FERRIS COULD HAVE TALKED.

NOT LIKELY. THE DRUGS I PUMPED INTO HIM, I DOUBT HE REMEMBERS ANYTHING ABOUT THAT LITTLE SESSION BEYOND SOME BAD DREAMS. I THINK...

OW-W-W, NOW IT'S SPITTING!

PHIL, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

TEACHING THE KID HOW TO DO AN ENGLISH BREAKFAST, WHY?

ALBUQUERQUE

DOESN'T MATTER. I'M GOING OUT AGAIN. LISTEN, PHIL...

YEAH, LISTENING.

YOU *LOOK AFTER* SALLY ANNE. KEEP HER SAFE.

WELL, OF COUR-KLIK

ANOTHER DERELICT BUILDING, ANOTHER BROKEN LEAD.

FERRIS'S LIST IS STARTING TO LOOK LIKE A FIGMENT OF--

ONE THING YOU LEARN FROM A CAREER AS A SPY.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS *COINCIDENCE.*

AND WHEN THINGS APPEAR TO COINCIDE...

...YOU NEED TO BE READY.

THE SECURITY GUARD DIDN'T LIE ABOUT *THIS,* AT LEAST. NO ONE'S BEEN IN HERE FOR *MONTHS.*

YEARS, MAYBE.

WHOLE DAMN PLACE IS LIKE A MAUSOLEUM.

IT'S ENOUGH TO GIVE YOU THE CREEPS.

...VERY BRAVE...

YOU'RE GOING TO BE A *GOOD GIRL* FOR US, AREN'T YOU?

GOING TO *TAKE YOUR MEDICINE...*

...RESPONDING WELL TO THE DOSAGE.

OF COURSE. SHE'S *STRONG.*

IS SHE *UNDER* NOW?

PRETTY MUCH.

ALRIGHT, *LISTEN, NATASHA.* I'M GOING TO COUNT. AND I WANT YOU TO *COUNT WITH ME.*

FORTY-ONE, FORTY-TWO, FORTY-THREE...

FORTY ONE, FO-O-O-O-ORTY TWO, FOR-FOR-FOR...

...COME ON, NATASHA...

OH, NO...PLEASE, NO...

NOOOOO!

KRESH

LANGLEY, VIRGINIA

I BEG YOUR PARDON?

WHAT IS THIS, THE *PROM DATE* FROM HELL? I SAID *NO.* WANT ME TO *SPELL* IT FOR YOU?

YOU F--

I THINK WHAT MAX HERE IS *TRYING* TO SAY IS THAT WE'D LIKE SOME INTERAGENCY COOPERATION.

OH, IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK HE'S *TRYING* TO *SAY?* WELL, MAYBE YOU SHOULD ENROLL HIM IN *CHARM SCHOOL* SO HE CAN LEARN HOW TO *EXPRESS HIMSELF VERBALLY.*

MEANTIME, I LOST MY JOB TO DOWNSIZING *TWICE* WHILE THE CLOWNS WHO SET UP *THE NORTH INSTITUTE* WERE IN GOVERNMENT.

YOU WANT SUPERCOMPUTING CAPACITY? GO LOOK FOR IT IN *THE STREAMLINED PRIVATE SECTOR* WHERE YOU BELONG.

WE'LL BE BACK-- I'LL GET *N.S.A. CLEARANCE...*

ICT MONITORING

GOOD. GO GET IT. MEANWHILE, GET OUT OF MY FACE.

WELL, THAT'S FURY *AND* LANGLEY YOU'VE BLOWN. WHO DO YOU WANT TO YELL ABUSE AT NEXT--*THE FBI? PENTAGON ADVISORY*, MAYBE?

THINK *YOU* CAN DO ANY BETTER?

IS THAT A TRICK QUESTION?

THAT *YOU*, PHIL?

YEAH, WHO *ELSE* IS IT GOING TO BE ON *THIS* NUMBER?

PHIL, SHUT UP AND *LISTEN.* YOU'RE IN TROUBLE. I JUST HAD A VISIT FROM *NORTH.*

NORTH? THAT'S UP AND RUNNING THESE DAYS?

OH, *YEAH.* UP AND RUNNING, AND *COMING YOUR WAY.*

SOON AS THEY FIND A CRACK, PHIL. AND THAT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME.

SKREEK

OFF THE FLORIDA COAST

NO, IT IS A MATTER OF *COMPETENCE.* COMPETENCE, MR. MCMASTERS, WHICH I HAVE AND YOUR FRIENDS AT NORTH *DO NOT.*

SON, I KNOW YOU'VE KILLED MORE DANGEROUS MEN THAN I'VE HAD MIAMI WORKING GIRLS--

--AND I *SAW* WHAT YOU DID TO JACK MULLAN WHEN HE CAME AFTER ME. IN FACT, I'LL PROBABLY NEVER GET HIS BLOOD OUT OF MY *UPHOLSTERY.* BUT--

MULLAN WAS *NOTHING.* A *CHEAP MERCENARY* IN THE PAY OF *COCAINE-ADDLED FOOLS.* IN THE RED ROOM, I WAS TRAINED TO KILL *REAL* WARRIORS, MEN OF *CALIBER.* THAT IS MY PROFESS--

YES, AND MAYBE IF YOU'D GONE AFTER THIS WOMAN *YOURSELF,* YOU'D HAVE *KILLED* HER, TOO.

BUT YOU *DIDN'T,* YOU *FARMED IT OUT* AND THE MAN YOU SENT *FAILED.* I CAN'T *AFFORD* ANY MORE MISCALCULATIONS. *NORTH* WILL--

BLEEE-BLEEE

WELL, THERE YOU GO, SON. SOMETHING ELSE FOR YOU TO WORRY ABOUT.

YES?

...THERE ARE THINGS WE NEED TO DISCUSS...

VASSILY, DEAREST...

CAME FROM *UP HERE* SOMEWHERE...

PROBABLY JUST THE *WIND*, MISHA. SIT HERE *LONG ENOUGH*...

...YOU START TO IMAGINE ALL SORTS OF *WEIRD STUFF*--

HOY!

SO I'M IMAGINING *THIS*, I AM?

HEY, IT'S THAT HONEY WAS AT THE *DOOR* BEFORE. HOW THE HELL'D SHE GET *UP HERE*?

BEATS ME.

LEAVE ME *ALONE*.

HEH HEH! SUGAR, IF YOU WERE LOOKING FOR SOMEWHERE *DRY* TO SLEEP--

I *SAID*--

NO, COME ON, MAN, SHE LOOKS REALLY--

LEAVE ME ALONE!

AAAAGH!

UGH!

NO, PLEASE, GOD, PLEASE--

DON'T KILL ME--

SKKING

GUURGH!

BLAM

YOU ARE ONE OF THEM, AREN'T YOU?

YOU HAD BETTER COME WITH ME.

AND THEN I WAKE UP.

ALL RIGHT, THAT'S FAR ENOUGH. WHO ARE YOU?

SOUNDED LIKE A GUNSHOT TO ME.

HOY, MISHA! YOU OKAY UP THERE?

FOR THE TIME IT TAKES ME TO GET A GRIP, I LET HIM DRAG ME ALONG LIKE SOME MOVIE FEMALE IN PERIL.

COME, WE HAVE NO TIME TO--

I SAID, WHO ARE YOU?

VERY WELL. *GRIGOR IVANOVICH PCHELINTSOV.* ONE-TIME PROFESSOR OF *PSYCHOTECHNICS.* AND YOU ARE *BLACK WIDOW.* ENCHANTED TO MEET YOU.

NOW *PLEASE--*

--WE DO *NOT* HAVE MUCH TIME FOR *NICETIES.*

EITHER *TRUST ME...*

...OR FIND YOUR OWN *WAY OUT.*

GOOD. THIS WAY.

NOW THAT THEY *THINK* WE'VE CLIMBED *OUT IN THE RAIN...*

...WE CAN STAY *HERE* IN THE *DRY.*

THEY WON'T CHECK *INSIDE* AS WELL? CHECK FOR *FOOTPRINTS?*

THESE ARE NOT *RED ROOM CADRES,* MY DEAR. THEY ARE *NIGHT WATCHMEN.* AND IN THESE TIMES OF *MARKET* FORCES, ONE HIRES THE *CHEAPEST,* NOT THE *BEST.*

ALCOHOLIC *EX-COPS,* AFGHANISTAN VETERANS WITH *HEROIN DEPENDENCY,* SOME *REDUNDANT KGB MUSCLE* WITHOUT THE *BRAINS* TO DO *ANYTHING ELSE.*

THEY'RE NOT *BAD MEN* MOSTLY, BUT NOR ARE THEY THE *CREAM* OF OUR GREAT NATION'S ENFORCEMENT POTENTIAL.

I FIND THEM RELATIVELY EASY TO OUTWIT, AND I *KNOW* THE *BUILDING* FAR BETTER THAN THEY DO. I *WORKED* HERE FOR MANY YEARS, YOU SEE.

NOW, PERHAPS IRONICALLY, I *LIVE* HERE.

PLEASE EXCUSE THE *SMELL.* THERE ARE WORKING SHOWERS THAT I USE ELSEWHERE IN THE BUILDING WHEN I CAN, BUT AS YET, I FIND IT *DIFFICULT* TO WASH MY CLOTHES WITH ANY *REGULARITY.*

IN ANY CASE, YOU ARE MOST WELCOME. SOME *TEA,* PERHAPS?

YOU CALLED ME *BLACK WIDOW--*

YES--A RUDE GENERALIZATION, I *KNOW.* BUT THERE WAS LITTLE TIME FOR ASKING *NAMES.*

BUT YOU *RECOGNIZE* ME?

NOT *YOU* PERSONALLY, NO. BUT THE *TYPE,* YES. THERE WERE CERTAIN *SIMILARITIES* IN YOU ALL.

ALL???

YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT *YELENA BELOVA,* RIGHT?

YEL--?

OH--*HER.* OH, MY GOODNESS, NO. BELOVA WAS A, AN *ABERRATION.* NOTHING TO DO WITH THE *REAL* BLACK WIDOW PROGRAM. I BELIEVE SHE MODELS *FETISH LINGERIE* THESE DAYS.

NO, NO, I'M TALKING ABOUT THE *TWENTY-SEVEN ORIGINAL BLACK WIDOW DEEP-COVER AGENTS* WE DEPLOYED IN CHINA AND THE WEST BACK IN THE OLD DAYS.

MORE TEA?

WHAT DID YOU PEOPLE DO TO ME?

I REMEMBER *THAT ROOM* BACK THERE. BUT I-I REMEMBER...*BALLET CLASSES*...THE *BOLSHOI*...

IT *HURTS.*

YES, IF I WERE YOU, I'D TRY NOT TO *THINK* DIRECTLY ABOUT IT. PART OF THE *CONDITIONING*, YOU SEE. *PSYCHOCHEMICAL*, VERY *CRUDE* BACK THEN, BUT *VERY POWERFUL.*

YOU CAN *ENJOY* THE MEMORIES THEMSELVES, THAT'S WHAT THEY WERE *PUT THERE* FOR.

BUT IF YOU TRY TO *THINK LOGICALLY* ABOUT IT, WELL, THERE'S A *DETERRENT* EFFECT. *HEADACHE*, THEN *NAUSEA*. *UNCONSCIOUSNESS*, EVENTUALLY.

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU.

THERE, YOU SEE. *THAT'S* THE CONDITIONING.

IT REALLY WAS *STATE-OF-THE-ART* BACK THEN--

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU! WHY WOULD YOU *DO* SOMETHING LIKE THAT? WHY *BALLET?*

WELL, WHAT LITTLE GIRL *DOESN'T* WANT TO BE A *BALLERINA?* YOU WERE AN *ORPHAN* LIKE ALL THE OTHERS, THE IDEA WAS TO GIVE YOU SOMETHING *ROSY AND PERFECT* TO REMEMBER THE *MOTHERLAND* BY. TO KEEP YOU *LOYAL*, YOU SEE.

I DON'T...

BUT OF COURSE, IF YOU *THOUGHT* LOGICALLY ABOUT IT...

...WELL, IF YOU WERE A *BOLSHOI BALLERINA*, FOR ONE THING, YOUR *FEET* WOULD BE HORRIBLY *MAIMED* FROM ALL THE *DANCING* ON *BLOCKS.*

THEY'RE *NOT* THOUGH, ARE THEY?

I--

I'M REALLY VERY SORRY TO DO THIS TO YOU.

KLURRRGH URGH

WHY? WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

YOU FIXED ME LIKE THIS WHEN I WAS A *DEFENSELESS CHILD.* WHY THE SUDDEN *ATTACK OF CONSCIENCE* NOW?

I--MY DEAR, YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND. IT WAS A *DIFFERENT TIME.* WE *BELIEVED* IN OUR COUNTRY, IN THE *SOCIALIST REVOLUTION.* IN WHAT WE WERE *DOING.* WE WERE *PATRIOTS.*

THAT'S A *LOUSY EXCUSE* FOR BAD BEHAVIOR. ALWAYS HAS BEEN.

WELL, *PATRIOT.* FEEL LIKE *DYING FOR YOUR COUNTRY* RIGHT NOW?

UHH, I'D REALLY RATHER NOT.

I GUESSED. WELL, HERE'S YOUR *ESCAPE CLAUSE,* GRIGOR IVANOVICH: *MEDUSAGEN.*

MED--?

DON'T KNOW IT? WHAT A SHAME.

NO, NO, *LOOK.* THAT'S NOT MY *DEPARTMENT,* PLEASE. THAT'S *BIOTECH.* THEY DID ALL THAT WORK AT THE *URALS COMPLEX.*

THE *URALS?*

YES, YES, THERE'S STILL A *FIELD STATION* OUT THERE. DISUSED BUT--

A FIELD IN THE EAST?

LOOKS LIKE YOU MISS THE CHANCE OF A GLORIOUS DEATH FOR YOUR COUNTRY AFTER ALL.

OH, THANK YOU, OH, *THANK GOD* FOR THAT.

YEAH, WELL DON'T GO THANKING HIM *JUST YET.* I'M GOING TO NEED YOU TO *TAKE* ME TO THIS FIELD STATION.

TAKE--?

BUT IT'S TWO THOUSAND KILOMETERS FROM HERE!

SO? WHERE'S YOUR SENSE OF *ADVENTURE,* GRIGOR IVANOVICH?

LOOK, THERE'S NO *AIRPORT* CLOSE. NO GOOD *ROAD.* OFFICIALLY THE SITE DOES NOT EVEN *EXIST.* IT'S IN THE MIDDLE OF *NOWHERE.*

WE'D NEED TRANSPORT. *ALL-TERRAIN* TRANSPORT. AN *ARMY JEEP*, AT LEAST.

OH, *THAT* ISN'T GOING TO BE A PROBLEM.

SO YOU WANT TO GO FOR A *RIDE*, BABY?

VERY MUCH SO, YES.

OUT.

GET IN.

GOT MY CLOTHES THERE?

UH, YES, I--

GOOD. FIRST FUEL STOP YOU CAN HAVE YOUR COAT BACK. MEANWHILE, IT'S GOING TO BE A LONG JOURNEY. HOW ABOUT WE PASS THE TIME WITH SOME STORYTELLING?

YOU CAN START WITH THE BLACK WIDOW PROGRAM. EVERYTHING YOU DID FOR THEM. EVERYTHING YOU KNOW.

BUT THIS WILL MAKE YOU ILL! YOU'VE SEEN WHAT THE ADVERSE REACTIONS ARE LIKE WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR PAST.

Phenoany
Military Grade
Extreme
High-Potency
Painkiller
CAUTION!
Use as Directe

YOU'RE TOO KIND, GRIGOR IVANOVICH. NOW START TALKING. DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.

I'LL COPE.

TO BE CONTINUED...